



# Chemical Week

An Interview with Leila Oksanan,  
Managing Director, Polymermarketplace

**IHS Markit: With the unprecedented changes occurring in global economies currently, what impact do you see on the polymers market, both in the near and long term?**

LO: In the short term, there are two distinct scenarios! It will either continue the trend towards globalization or producers will concentrate on their own continents. Long term, things should stabilize once the pandemic is behind us.

I think that the long-term impact will be driven to some degree by changes to sales organizations as they evaluate the value of face to face contact with clients and businesses seeking efficiencies in their supply chains. Hopefully this will go hand in hand with a greater focus on sustainability and evaluating the impact/footprint of new supplier alternatives.

**IHS Markit: How is the current trough in oil pricing impacting the market in your view?**

LO: While we aren't affected directly by it as a company, we do see more buyers in holding patterns, inventories increasing, and surplus stocks being presented to a wider audience of potential buyers.

Our platform itself has seen a larger volume of transactions due to the need for shorter sales cycles and the need to make decisions quickly to capitalize on market trends and sentiments.

**IHS Markit: What are the key drivers for growth and expansion in polymers in the coming years?**

LO: The three "megatrends" that I see are sustainability/circular economy/recycling, digitalization and e-commerce. Given that we're based in Europe, we're watching the first item very closely as the European Commission has taken a strong leadership position on developing a more clean and competitive economy through digitalization.

We're currently working diligently internally to develop a circular platform that enables fully digitalized selling and purchasing with full traceability of materials as part of the circular economy.

This will support the regulatory initiatives that are being implemented globally and help to close the gap between the supply and demand mismatch that exists today.

One of our main goals with this platform is to make it fully neutral and available to everyone in the entire chain from municipal waste collectors to recyclers, processors, brand owners to retailers.

**IHS Markit: Which geographic regions do you see as key to that expansion?**

LO: The expansion and adaptation of circularity is going to be significantly faster in continents where infrastructure is already in place. I personally see huge potential in Asia where change and action are required quickly to prevent waste going into landfills and then into the environment.

Constructing the infrastructure and changing consumer behavior in that area are the biggest challenges facing it today. If digitalization can help to support these efforts by making it easier to sell, buy and trace recycled post-consumer products, we'll be there to assist.

**IHS Markit: What role will digitalization and e-commerce play in facilitating that growth?**

LO: Digitalization facilitates a faster approach to larger audiences, maximizes profit margins and lowers inventories as unique products can be offered globally.

This can lead to cost savings, less manpower required to sell larger volumes into global markets and availability to purchase on a 24/7 basis regardless of location.

One significant advantage I see for the buyers at smaller to medium size companies is that digitalization allows these customers to have a much more level playing field and opportunity to participate in offerings.

On the seller side, digitalization allows companies to complete sales quickly and more efficiently and capture better margins with customers who they might not currently have inroads with.

**IHS Markit: What are the key attributes you feel buyers and sellers need to utilize an electronic platform/marketplace to conduct business?**

LO: This is an excellent question – that both parties need a computer and working email address come to mind immediately!

But joking aside, I think the key is to have vision and not be afraid of change. The saying “this is how we’ve always done it” is not simply not going to apply any longer.

Digitalization is here to stay, and its use is only going to accelerate in the years to come. I think every company needs a digital leader who looks beyond the short term and develops a plan/vision for the next decade or the decade beyond that.

**IHS Markit: Taking the above into consideration, how is Polymermarketplace positioned to assist the petrochemical industry operate more efficiently and profitably?**

LO: When developing Polymermarketplace there were a number of key points that we wanted to achieve to ensure we provide a relevant tool for our clients. I’ll touch on several of them as I discuss our overall aims and goals.

We aim to help to enable sellers connect with a much larger audience than is possible through traditional outlets (phone/e-mail/mobile chat). Streamlining the sales process through Polymermarketplace allows relationships to grow differently and internal sales teams at our clients to focus on other activities such as prospecting and business development.

We’re also cognizant that this is a global business and the challenges that come with that. Our platform has different regional versions for EU, Export and North America – each one is customized to the specific needs of the region and the business.

At the end of the day - Polymermarketplace isn’t just a platform, it’s a partner. It’s not intended to replace existing relationships between buyers and sellers – it’s designed to enhance them and make them stronger.

**IHS Markit: What sets Polymermarketplace apart from other e-commerce, e-service providers in the petrochemical space?**

LO: I think one of the main differences is that the Polymermarketplace team consists of industry professionals across the board, even including our developers. This experience helps us understand and address the specific needs of our clients.

The heart of our business is innovation and Polymermarketplace development is fast and risk free for our clients. We handle much of the work for them and guide them through the process from testing to customer onboarding and beyond.

We can also be part of the change management team if needed to give our expertise. This can add significant value especially when linking the platform directly to an ERP system the client currently uses.

When first conceptualized over five years ago, the vision for Polymermarketplace was to offer the industry a closed platform in which a seller can define their own strategy and customer portfolio. For us, the key is to provide a platform which brings value to the user and improves profit margins, reduces working capital and increases internal transparency. We also believe that the seller needs to have 100% ownership in their sales strategy.

**IHS Markit: What final thoughts would you like to leave our readers with?**

LO: The need for smart, digital sales tools has increased significantly in the past few months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's become clear to us that the current situation demands more secure, value added and easy to utilize sales platforms globally. If people on personal level can adapt to new technologies, there is no reason why the industry can't do so and in a more agile manner. Some of this lack of agility currently is due to lack of awareness of what digital options are available and how to find the right fit for the company's vision and strategy.

If you can achieve better bottom line results with less effort, then the benefit is significant, but it needs to be applied to the whole value chain to really see the usefulness of digitalization.



**Leila Oksanen is the Managing Director of Polymermarketplace,** responsible for the overall management of the company and the brand. Prior to joining Polymermarketplace, Leila held a variety of roles at Lyondellbasell, Solutia and SAP. She holds a BA in Business Management from Vesalius College and is a native of Finland.



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